

While Stan VanDerBeek was part of the "Rockefeller Artists-in-Television" residency program at Boston public television station WGBH from 1969-1970, he produced the simulcast television program *Violence Sonata*. The program, directed by David Atwood and Fred Barzyk, was transmitted simultaneously on both Channels 2 and 44 on January 12, 1970, with the suggestion that viewers place two television sets side-by-side. Following sonata form, the piece is composed of three segments: "Man," "Man to Woman," and "Man to Man." The simultaneous broadcast consisted of material VanDerBeek composed from previous films, archival and newsreel footage, video shot in Boston for the show, and filmed collages, further manipulated and enhanced through overlays and color saturation. Sections of the broadcast were played before a live studio audience, with actors also performing a play written by VanDerBeek for the show. Home viewers were encouraged to call in their responses to the program between the acts. The series of collages entitled, *The History of Violence in America* was conceived as layouts for reproduction and in a booklet to accompany the broadcast.

From 1975 to 1981, VanDerBeek experimented with projecting multiple images and computer generated films onto clouds of steam in collaboration with Cambridge-based artist Joan Brigham, who was a research fellow at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT from 1974-99. *Under Aquarius* (1976) was conceived as a "multimedia, above-and-below-water theater," and was comprised of light displays, underwater projections, and a submerged orchestra. The piece was performed in MIT's Bauhaus-inspired Alumni Pool building and the following year the piece was modified and presented in Hampshire College's swimming pool, with performances by the American Underwater Band of Miami and synchronized swimmers choreographed by VanDerBeek's daughter August. *Steam Screens* (1979) was performed in the sculpture garden at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, and later the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, in 1981. During the performance, moving steam waves refracted projected films and computer-generated animation, allowing the viewer to walk through the images.

About the Artist

Stan VanDerBeek was born in New York, NY, 1927 and died in Baltimore, MD, in 1984. He studied at Cooper Union and Black Mountain College, receiving honorary doctorate degrees from both. The artist's film work has been presented in numerous film festivals since 1967, including the Lincoln Center Film Festival, the London Film Festival, the Washington International Film Festival, and the New York International Film Festival. He was the recipient of many grants including several from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, and an American Film Institute Independent Filmmaker award. VanDerBeek collaborated with numerous

organizations serving as a residency artist and researcher at television stations, universities, foundations, scientific laboratories, and government agencies among them: Bell Labs, CBS-TV, WGBH, MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies, National Aeronautics Space Administration (NASA), and the United States Information Agency (USIA). VanDerBeek taught at Columbia University (1963-65), State University of New York (SUNY) Stony Brook (1967-72), and University of South Florida (1972-75). From 1975 until his death in 1984, he was a Professor of Art at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Baltimore, MD.

Vanderbeek's work was included in the pioneering exhibitions *Cybernetic Serendipity*, Institute of Contemporary Art, (ICA) London, U.K., Smithsonian Institute, Washington, DC (1968-69); *The Projected Image*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (1968); and *Software*, The Jewish Museum, New York, NY (1970). His work was also included in the 1983 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY. In addition, VanDerBeek's work has been shown at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Kunsthaus Zürich, Zürich, Switzerland; Anthology Film Archives, New York, NY; Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna Austria; the Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA; and the Museum of Modern Art, NY, among many others. His work can also be found in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, NY; the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL; The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA; and The Arts Council of Great Britain, London, UK

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Stan VanDerBeek: The Culture Intercom

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MIT LIST VISUAL ARTS CENTER

Stan VanDerBeek: The Culture Intercom

Stan VanDerBeek: The Culture Intercom highlights the artist's contributions to today's media-based artistic practices. The exhibition features early paintings and collages, his animations and films, re-creations of immersive projection and "expanded cinema" environments, documentation of site-specific and telecommunications projects, and material related to his performance and durational work. Stan VanDerBeek readily adopted disparate artistic forms, from moving images to mainframe computers, to forge a vision of art, technology, and the human condition. His early paintings, drawings, and photographs emerged from the tradition of Black Mountain College, and were influenced by Dada and the Beat Generation. In the mid-1950s, he produced a body of work now regarded as one of the most significant contributions to American avant-garde cinema. VanDerBeek incorporated animated collages, live action, and found footage in his films throughout the 1960s, as well as electronic processing techniques and computer graphics in later film and video-based work. His interest shifted to immersive multimedia work in the mid-1960s, and he went on to conceive several participatory and performance-based events throughout the late 1970s and early '80s. Throughout his artistic life, VanDerBeek remained committed to a vision of the transformation of perception and knowledge in an electronic age, and the socially emancipatory potential of new forms of visual communication.

VanDerBeek's first forays into film took place at Black Mountain College during his time there as a student between 1949 and 1950. Influenced by Surrealism and Dada, the Beat Generation, and the cinema of Georges Méliès and Buster Keaton, VanDerBeek's earliest films utilized stop-motion animation skills he developed while working on the CBS children's television program, *Winky Dink and You*. His films such as *A La Mode* (1958), *Science Friction* (1959), and *Breathdeath* (1963), fused experimental film with social critique and anti-war imagery. The artist also documented several happenings and performance pieces by Claes Oldenburg and Allen Kaprow in the late 1950s and early '60s. His film *Site* (1964) captures a performance of Robert Morris' eponymous collaboration with Carolee Schneemann at the Surplus Dance Theater in New York, in 1964. The use of computer and image processing systems at Bell Labs, MIT, and public television stations through the 1970s, led VanDerBeek to produce complex video-based work such as *Symmetricks* (1972) and *Microcosmos* (1983), reflecting the artist's ongoing interest in new forms of moving image media.

In the early 1960s, VanDerBeek began to experiment with multiple projection environments of image and sound. These multi-image arrays,

or "movie murals," were comprised of material drawn from many sources, including found footage, 35mm slide projections, and VanDerBeek's own films. The "movie murals" were part of his research into a "non-verbal, international picture language," that could transform cinema into "a tool for world communication." Such immersive projection environments—"collages of media," as one contemporary film critic called them—would allow for the subjective assimilation of vast amounts of information via optical communication.

VanDerBeek began a series of animated films called *Poemfields* in 1964 using the BEFLIX movie-making system, an early computer graphic programming language invented by Ken Knowlton, a physicist working at Bell Telephone Laboratories in Murray Hill, NJ. The films were created by loading an early IBM data processing computer with instructions on punch cards. The output was then transferred to film using a microfilm recording device resulting in a black and white film. The rich colors in the series of films were added in postproduction. The ability to generate type on a screen was a radically new tool for VanDerBeek, who never mastered programming language but was dependent on collaborations with Knowlton, MIT computer engineer Wade Shaw, and others to make use of such technology. While originally shown as 16mm film projections, VanDerBeek considered this format of the *Poemfields* an intermediate stage required by the state of technology, later seeing video as a new presentation form for a computer-generated image. As VanDerBeek tended to reuse elements and alter finished works, the number of *Poemfields* completed and their precise dates remains unclear (several black and white prints of the films also exist.) The four films shown here represent the most finished and preserved iterations of the project.

From 1963-1965, VanDerBeek constructed an audiovisual laboratory and theater in Stony Point, NY to present multiple film projection environments. The thirty-one-foot-high aluminized metal dome, called the *Movie-Drome*, was cobbled together from a variety of materials, including a mail order grain silo. The choice of the dome was influenced by Buckminster Fuller, whom VanDerBeek met while a student at Cooper Union, and whose geodesic architecture became virtually synonymous with 1960s counterculture. Projected on the curved interior walls of the *Movie-Drome* were a variety of juxtaposed images from disparate source material: advertisements, clips of current events, anthropological and art historical images, extracts from VanDerBeek's own films, and imagery drawn from a variety of disciplines, including anatomy, physics, and astronomy. The media used in these "movie murals" included different gauges of found and shot film, acetate projections, and handmade 35mm slides. The result was an ever changing immersive and multimedia stream of images and sounds.

VanDerBeek conceived of combining such audiovisual environments into a "culture-intercom," further domes scattered about the world that would receive transmissions by satellite. He expressed this critical assessment of the social character of technology, and the responsibility of the artist in shaping its future, through a series of influential texts from the same time. *Cine Dreams* (1972), an eight-hour event of sounds and projected 16mm films and newsreel footage turned the Strassenburgh Planetarium in Rochester NY, into a "group dream."

Composer John Cage conceived of *Variations V* for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in 1965. Cage created the score by flipping coins to determine chance elements, with thirty-seven sections outlining the structure and components of the piece. Part of Cage's composition called for a system allowing sounds to be brought about by movement. A series of ten directional photocells, designed by composer and pianist David Tudor and engineer Billy Klüver, were wired to activate tape-recorders and short-wave radios as the dancers crossed their path, with Cage, Tudor, and Gordon Mumma operating equipment to modify and determine the sounds. A second set-up developed by Klüver incorporated a series of antennas; when a dancer came within four feet, a sound would be produced. Film footage by VanDerBeek was projected on screens behind the dancers. His selections were a mix of archival newsreel footage and popular film and television programs. The piece was first performed at Philharmonic Hall in New York City on July 23, 1965. In 1966, the collaborators produced a 50-minute film version directed by Arne Arnborn at Norddeutscher Rundfunk in Hamburg, Germany, the footage of which, including television manipulations by Nam June Paik, is shown here.

While a fellow at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS) at MIT in 1969, VanDerBeek experimented with transmitting art over telephone using an early facsimile machine. A mosaic-like mural of images was composed in "real time," and sent from his studio at MIT using a Xerox machine called a "Telecopier," to any location in the world that had access to a telephone line and a similar machine. According to VanDerBeek's notes, it took approximately 10 minutes to transmit each 8 1/2" x 14" page. An average installation of such a mural would involve sending 15 pages a day for four weeks. In March 1970, VanDerBeek transmitted a telephone mural, *Panels for the Walls of the World*, to several locations around Boston. A telephone mural was also commissioned for the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, MN, and the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. The recreated version of the telephone mural shown here was faxed to the List Visual Arts Center using VanDerBeek's original collages, following the mosaic design for the Walker Art Center mural.